

## Islington Borough Council increases Direct Debit sign-up by highlighting its convenience

An innovative and wide-ranging campaign by Islington Borough Council, promoting the convenience of Direct Debit has helped the local authority to sign-up almost 4,000 more residents to pay Council Tax using this method. It has also earned Islington a prestigious Outstanding Achievement Award from Bacs, as well as top place in its respective Direct Debit Challenge League.

### Communication is key

The local authority took the unique, but very successful, step of creating a campaign that communicated the benefits of Direct Debit internally to staff, as well as externally to residents. The internal campaign sought to highlight why Direct Debit was such an important collection tool for the local authority, impressing upon frontline staff that if residents pay by Direct Debit it saves the authority money.

The external element of the campaign concentrated on highlighting the convenience of paying by Direct Debit. Using the tagline "Direct Debit – the really really easy way to pay", Islington produced promotional material that reinforced the key benefits of paying by Direct Debit, including reduced paperwork, avoiding queues and postage, peace-of-mind and the safety of the Direct Debit Guarantee.

### Attention grabbing incentives

John Allen, Head of Revenues and Customer Relations said: "In tandem with promoting its convenience, we also created a series of incentives to grab resident's attention and really bring to their attention the overall benefits of Direct Debit. For every resident who paid their council tax by Direct Debit, we offered a credit of £20 paid directly into their bank account. To support this, we also ran monthly and half-yearly prize draws, giving Direct Debit payers the chance to win prizes to the value of £500 and £1,000 respectively. This was publicised over a wide range of mediums including inserts, posters, contact cards, a magazine wrap on the residents' magazine and in the billing packages."

In addition to its initial attention grabbing Direct Debit incentives, the local authority also sought to make this payment method as flexible as possible for residents. As a result Islington offered residents paying by Direct Debit 12 instalments in place of the standard 10. They could also choose from four different payment dates in the month, enabling residents to select the one most convenient for them.

### The Direct Debit alternative for bad payers

The campaign's second phase sought to address those residents who had defaulted on payments and reach the enforcement stage. The core aim was to help them regain a steady footing by offering them an alternative to the standard lump sum payment. Following receipt of a summons, residents were given the opportunity to pay the amount by instalments as long as it was done using Direct Debit.

John Allen, Head of Revenues and Customer Relations concluded: "Phase two of the campaign proved exceptionally valuable and more than 2,500 residents who had reached this point chose to switch to Direct Debit. This was positive in two ways as it helped the residents to get in control of the debt and it also helped us to convert what were previously 'bad payers'. We are delighted not just to have won our Direct Debit Challenge League, but to also secure an Outstanding Achievement Award. It is a fantastic statement about the effort our team has put in over the year and the success of our campaign."